

FARM POLICY EXTENSION WORK

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This discussion deals with some work now in progress in which you certainly will have a direct interest. It is an effort initiated by the FES to help the states conduct educational work in connection with national policies concerned with the excess productive capacity in agriculture and the prices of farm products. While the effort was organized by the FES, it involves workers in a number of states. It is, indeed, a cooperative effort between the FES and the states to facilitate work in this field.

We are interested in informing you at this stage, as the work is nicely underway, and receiving your suggestions. Also, we are working with the directors to keep them informed.

Let me very briefly present some of the background for the initiation of this work.

First, Extension has accepted responsibility for educational work in public affairs affecting agriculture. We could cite many documents expressing this acceptance of responsibility. Let me briefly quote just one source, a talk by Administrator York to this conference a year ago:

Extension was created to provide an educational program aimed at dealing with some of the most pressing economic and social problems of rural people. . . . Public policy decisions are deeply involved in all of these problems. The guidelines to our Scope Report, which many of you helped prepare, state clearly: "There can be no question of Extension's responsibility in public affairs. The legal mandate is implicit — reinforced by insistent demands of people for help in understanding public problems."

Second, I think we all recognize national decisions dealing with our problems of excess productive capacity and price as among the more important public matters affecting agriculture. If we are to be truly concerned with problems of farmers and public decisions affecting them, educational work dealing with this problem seems to deserve high priority.

Third, we in the FES recognize the very considerable amount of work that you and other members of the staff in your state have done on this subject. As an organization, we indeed have made considerable progress. Also, I want to give public recognition of the very strong support provided by the Farm Foundation in helping to make this

progress. However, we are very frequently impressed by the very considerable lack of understanding of the problem, the policy alternatives, and the consequences, and the very great need for increased understanding. In this connection, I would add that although understanding among farm people is most important, increased understanding on the part of nonfarm and urban groups is of growing importance. Increasingly the attitudes of urban groups are going to be felt as the decisions are made.

Fourth, we recognize that a farm bill is now being passed but this does not settle the issues. The issues will be before the next Congress, and the next. Sustained emphasis on educational work on this problem will continue to be needed. However, the strong concern about government costs, the severity of the problems, and the great lack of understanding seem to indicate the desirability of some increased emphasis in the future months and years. The period ahead is likely to be one of critical decision.

In light of these considerations the FES decided to take the initiative in working with the states to pool some experience and knowledge, to help all states do an effective educational job in this field. The procedure that is being followed recognizes the very great experience many of you have had in doing educational work on this problem, and the invaluable contribution that can be made to other educators by those who have been on the firing line dealing successfully with these issues. We wish we might have involved more of you in the work done to date, but the work was initiated when many of you were on foreign tours and otherwise committed, and it was decided to keep the task force small to facilitate accomplishment. All of you will have your turn.

Next, let me comment briefly on the Extension Service's role in this field—this provides part of the framework in which the work is being done.

As we see it, our role is strictly one of education—to provide people with reliable information about the problem and the policy alternatives together with a framework of principles within which to analyze this information; to motivate them to analyze the problem and the alternatives and reach their own conclusions within the framework of their own value systems and goals; and to encourage them to participate in the decision-making process on the basis of their evaluations. Our role is to be strictly objective, helping people understand all facets of the problem and the alternatives. Let me be perfectly clear on one thing—the FES is under no pressure whatever to be anything but absolutely objective.

In initiating the effort that is underway we in the Administrator's office had three objectives: First, and foremost, we wanted to help the states do a job of education that would result in widespread improvement in understanding of the problem and the policy alternatives. This objective overshadows the others. But, frankly, we also wanted to demonstrate that the Extension Service is a dynamic organization, aware of the problems of agriculture, and willing to carry out its responsibilities. The third minor objective was to strongly demonstrate that the Cooperative Extension Service, including the FES, is in a position to do a completely objective job on an important controversial public issue.

I think we all recognize that this is not a safe and secure area of work—I don't need to tell this to a group that is on the firing line. I have said before—and I still think it is true—that the greatest danger is that people conducting work in this field may fail to recognize their own values and, thus, fail to avoid a coloring of their work by judgments based on their own values. The procedures being followed in this effort are designed to minimize this danger in the preparation of materials.

Last summer after the defeat of the first 1962 Farm Bill, our staff recommended that we initiate the development of materials to help the states do a basic job of education on this problem with farm and nonfarm people—recognizing the very considerable lack of understanding, the importance of the issues, and the very great interest in them.

We brought together a small task force of policy specialists to consider the idea, after discussing the idea with their directors. This group concurred that the job should be done and prepared a series of resource papers as a basis for such educational work. The first draft of these papers will be distributed today. The Policy Committee plans to appoint a committee of outstanding authorities to review these papers. They will be concerned with checking whether the best available data are used, whether the economics are sound, and whether any biases are evident. After this review and the discussion with you, these papers will be further polished.

Another coordinated task force of program leaders and information specialists is developing a program guide laying out alternative program activities for agents and suggesting procedure to accompany these alternatives.

As this work progresses another group plans to prepare suggested training aids and materials for mass media use.

It is recognized that throughout this process materials and program suggestions will probably require considerable adaptation, localization, and supplementation in individual states. But it is hoped that the materials will make it easier for a state with limited staff resources (and what state isn't limited) to do a job.

Another point I want to stress is this. Everyone concerned with this work recognizes that each state has program responsibility, each has its own plans and commitments, each has special needs and problems. As an ex-extension director I am especially cognizant of this. Therefore, the materials are made available for consideration in each state—without any pressure to make use of them at any time. However, we hope people in each state will recognize the special needs of the day and the careful work that has gone into the preparation of the materials, and then carefully consider possible use of the material in their program.

In closing let me say this is a new type of cooperative effort—an experiment of sorts. We look forward to evaluating the results. Personally, I want to express for the organization very great appreciation to the task forces who are working on this job, and a great respect for the tremendous knowledge and ability they have displayed. With such workers Extension has a brilliant future in this field.

PART III

*Educational Policies
and Methods*

